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thus presenting a perfect cross-section (fig. 3). The central portion, corresponding to the oöspore was filled with nearly white silica, while the portion that was originally the wall of cellulose surrounding the oöspore was bluish in color. The furrows on the fruit (see fig. 1), caused by the five enveloping cells of the sporostegium, are separated by rather prominent ridges, but the walls are not marked with dots or processes as is so frequently the case. The base (fig. 2) showing the origin of the five enveloping cells, presents a small five sided orifice which answers to the point of attachment.

Among the 60 or more species that have been described in a fossil state, there are several that resemble *Chara Stantonii* in general appearance, but when more closely examined it is found that they all differ in size or number of cells exposed in side view, and as these are characters of great constancy it serves clearly to distinguish them. The geological position of this species prove it to be one of the oldest yet described. So far as now known the genus *Chara* had its origin in the Triassic, where it is represented by a single species. The Jurassic has two species, the Cretaceous very few, while the most are found in the upper Tertiary. — F. H. KNOWLTON, *U. S. National Museum, Washington, D. C.*

Is *Cypripedium spectabile* poisonous to the touch?—In the *Torrey Bulletin*, VI, 15 it is stated on the authority of the late Prof. H. H. Babcock of Chicago that after handling *Cypripedium spectabile* or *C. pubescens* he found himself suffering from a severe attack of skin poison. He had taken great pains to keep clear of *Rhus toxicodendron*, but notwithstanding, the same symptoms continued several successive seasons at a time when he was accustomed to handle the *Cypripedium*. The possibility of any effect of this kind was discredited at the time (*Torr. Bull.* VI, 22) nor did it seem credible. Some years later a similar case occurred in this vicinity and was reported to me by the attending physician. A lady near whose home grew a fine clump of *Cypripedium spectabile* had been in the habit of gathering it when in bloom and using it sometimes for home decoration and sometimes for the decoration of the church. At such times for four or five successive seasons she suffered from symptoms of *Rhus* poisoning, but on careful examination no *Rhus* could be found where the *Cypripedium* grew. These symptoms invariably appeared whenever the *Cypripedium* was in the house and disappeared with its removal, and on her removal to another part of the country never re-appeared. In fact, when she ceased collecting the plant she escaped entirely.

A third instance of a similar kind occurred in this part of the country in connection with one of my own students who had always been in the habit of handling *Rhus* with impunity and had done so for years.

Not long since he was severely poisoned immediately after having gathered and handled a large quantity of *Cypripedium spectabile* and in view of the above facts very naturally attributes his trouble to this plant.

The above is largely circumstantial evidence, it is true, but any one who has examined Dr. James C. White's *Dermatitis Venenata* cannot but suspect that there are not a few plants, harmless in the case of the great majority of those who handle them, which nevertheless may be harmful to certain persons of peculiar temperaments and susceptibilities.—HENRY G. JESUP, *Hanover, N. H.*

The pine grosbeak's attack on the ashes and spruces of Cambridge, Mass., in January, 1893.—For several days preceding January 15th, Cambridge received a visit from an unprecedented number of pine grosbeaks from the north. Flocks of hundreds filled the trees and grounds here and there throughout the city. Mr. William Brewster, the ornithologist, says that it is not at all strange to see a few of these birds during the winter, and that about every third year, they are apt to visit this region in considerable numbers, owing probably to a scarcity of food in their native home.

What they fed on chiefly, during their last visit, was the seeds of the ash and the buds of the spruces. They would attack a large ash tree, laden with fruit, and in a few hours strip off every key. Their method was to take the key in the beak, deftly split open the outer covering of the base of the fruit, and extract the seed. This Mr. Brewster saw them doing by hundreds, as he stood close by under the trees. The birds were so tame, in fact, that one could stand close up to them, within reaching distance, but they would hop away quickly, if an attempt was made to catch them. I was unfortunate myself, in not seeing the birds shelling the ash keys, but I did see the snow under the trees literally covered by the fallen fruit, and my herbarium contains a pocket full of the remnants left by the birds. As a rule, the key was entire, with the exception of the slit in the ovary, the slit running quite through both sides. Generally the wing was untouched, but sometimes it was split clean through. This divided the key into two parts, but I think the action was not at all intentional on the part of the bird, his object naturally being merely to get the seed.

The birds almost completely stripped the spruces of their buds, and I am much interested to know what effect this treatment will have on the growth of the trees. The Norway spruce is our common species, and though, as in the case of the ashes, I did not see the birds at work, I saw and made a careful examination of the havoc which they committed. Here again I have Mr. Brewster's testimony to the wonderful sight afforded by these voracious birds. The spruces were laden with